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The effect of using out-of-class contexts on EFL learners: an action research

O efeito do uso de contextos fora da sala de aula sobre os aprendizes da língua inglesa (LE): uma pesquisa-ação.

ABSTRACT - This work discusses the effect of Out-of-Class Language Learning (OCLL) in Communicative Competence in English within an EFL program with a group of native-Spanish students from Colombia (N=70) distributed in two groups. The experimental group attended an English instruction program based on OCLL, while participants in the control group attended the same EFL syllabus but inside the classroom. To measure the participants' performance, a pre-test and a post-test were administered to both groups. Results revealed that there were evident differences between both groups in the post-test performance in favor of the treatment group.

Key words: Out-of-Class Language Learning Strategies, Functional Practice, Communicative Competence, action-research

RESUMO - Este trabalho discute o efeito da Aprendizagem do Idioma Fora da Sala de Aula (AIFSA) sobre a competencia comunicativa do Inglês, em um programa de ensino de língua estrangeira com um grupo de estudantes nativos da Colômbia (N = 70) distribuídos em dois grupos. O grupo experimental participou de um programa de ensino de Inglês com base na AIFSA, enquanto o grupo de controle participou do mesmo programa de ensino, mas dentro da sala de aula. Para medir o desempenho dos participantes, um pré-teste e um pós-teste foram aplicados em ambos os grupos. Os resultados demonstraram que houve diferenças evidentes entre os dois grupos no desempenho pós-teste a favor do grupo experimental.

Palavras-chave: estratégias de aprendizagem do idioma fora da sala de aula, práticas funcionais, competência comunicativa, pesquisa-ação.

Introduction

The fact that English has become a global language (Crystal, 2003; Foley, 2007; Nunan, 2001, 2003) has originated an increasing interest on the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. However, it is easy to observe a lack of correspondence between CLT approach and what is really taught in the EFL classroom. Indeed, in many educational settings the practical English language teaching is turning its focus towards traditional teaching methods (Bax, 2003; Griffiths, 2011).

The language-teaching situation in Colombia, as in many other similar contexts, is not far from this reality. The Colombian government has started the Bilingual Colombia Program (BCP) to be attained in the long-term (2010/2019) with the purpose of improving the quality of English language teaching at all educational levels (MENC, 1994, 2004). Although the BCP is clearly based on the CLT methodology, and a student-centered approach has officially been adopted, the real situation at Colombian schools is that traditional methods are still dominating the EFL classroom practices. It is clear that the goals of the BCP have generated not only great expectations, but also serious concerns on the lack of correspondence between what is established by the Colombian government and the reality in the schools, where lack of human and material resources have become dominant features. Within this situation, many Colombian EFL students have developed their linguistic skills, mainly focused on grammar, and lacking of communicative competence. Although there are many difficulties in implementing CLT in the foreign language class in Colombia, as it happens in many other contexts, it is not impossible that FL learners achieve communicative competence in English. Promoting learning strategies that enhance the development of communicative skills both inside and outside of the classroom is of the utmost importance. Languages are not learned solely in the language classroom, but can take place at any time and in any place (Pickard, 1995; Hyland, 2004). Within this context, there is a strong need to find opportunities to use English out of the classroom walls (Cortina-Pérez, 2011). As Bialystok (1981) supported, functional out-of-class exposure to the target language is crucial for developing fluency in language skills.

This paper presents an action research carried out in a Colombian school where CLT method was not currently been adopted and, hence, students presented clear difficulties in expressing themselves fluently in English. The main purpose of this research is to identify the effect of using out-of-class learning contexts on EFL learners' communicative competence as a possible solution to increase participants' fluency in English, thus, achieving the BCP targets and facing the lack of ELT resources in schools.

Theoretical considerations

Out-of-class language learning (OCLL) has been broadly defined as "any kind of learning that takes place outside the classroom and involves self-instruction, naturalistic learning or self-directed naturalistic learning" (Benson, 2001, p. 62). Studies on OCLL, however, show that there has been inconsistency in wording the term; different authors use slightly different terms, for example Chausanachoti (2009) uses "out-of-class language activity", whereas Al-Otaibi (2004) prefers to use "out-of-class language practice"; Anderson (2004) chooses "out-of-class language use" and Pickard (1996) uses "out-of class language learning strategy" to refer to the same concept. Whether we use one term or the other, what they seem to have in common is their claim that language learning is not a process that occurs exclusively inside the language classroom, but also out of it. There seems to be a consensus that the use of OCLL has positive implications on learners' language proficiency.

Benson (2001) divides out-of-class learning into three categories:
- Self-instruction, where learners deliberately plan to improve the target language and search out resources to help them do this, for example by using self-study grammar books to improve their grammar;
- Naturalistic language learning, where students learn mainly unintentionally through communication and interaction with the target language group, for instance when students get engaged in discussions with English speaking classmates or colleagues;
- Self-directed naturalistic language learning, where learners create or seek out a language learning situation, but may not focus directly on learning the language while they are in that situation.

We distinguish two main modalities of OCLL:
- Orientated OCLL, where the teacher provides the learners with opportunities to improve their communicative skills out of the classroom.
- Autonomous OCLL, where the learner him/herself decides which activities to involve with in order to improve his/her communicative skills in the target language.

These two modalities can be seen as a continuum in the development of students' autonomy, first guided by the teacher, and then, alone. This guidance corresponds mainly with constructivist theories of learning, where the teacher or other students are scaffolds in the learning process. Therefore, OCLL is not just a strategy through which the learner can improve the communicative competence in a FL, but also his/her learning autonomy.

Researches on OCLL

Bialystok (1978) was one of the first researchers in paying attention to the role of out-of-class strategies in language learning. She concluded that out-of class exposure to the target language in communicative situations helped the learners complete language tasks they met subsequently, and that such functional practice was critical to the development of all language skills. Based on Bialystok's model of second language acquisition, Huang and Naerssen (1987) undertook a research project in China to study the role of functional strategies in the successful development of oral skills. They discovered that "students who were more successful in oral communication reported employing functional practice strategies more frequently than the less successful ones" (Huang and Naerssen, 1987, p. 290).

Since the 90s, many studies focused their attention on OCLL. Scarcella and Oxford (1992) suggested that out-of-class community enhances register awareness that may lead to an improvement in students' language proficiency. As proposed by Rubin and Tompson, "target language discourse outside the classroom has been found to inform learners about the appropriate use of language and the nature of conversation" (1994, cited *in* Pearson, 2003, p. 2). Similarly, Ellis (1994) concluded that learners get the most benefit from formal language instruction when it is coupled with opportunities for natural exposure to the language. Freed (1995) stated that intermediate-level learners, whose classroom instruction is based on a combination of grammar and communicative approach, benefit most interactive out-of-class-contact. Pickard (1996) interviewed a group of 20 German EFL undergraduate students about the OCLL strategies that they used. The results showed that participants were most frequently involved in leisure activities like watching TV, reading newspaper etc. mainly because they were interested on them and they have easy access to them.

Focused on conversational skills, Suh, Wasanasomsithi, Short, and Majid (1999) studied a group of eight ESL students at Indian University. They found that participants were involved mainly in independent leisure activities, which contributed to the improvement of participants' spoken skills. According to Suh *et al.* (1999, p. 14)

Out-of-class leisure activities will probably never replace the need for in-class second language instruction; however, some leisure activities are useful in the development of students' English conversation skills.

They also concluded that differences in preference in OCLL activities was of paramount importance in the development of participants' conversational skills, as different activities may have different impact on different students.

These differences on the students' preferences were also detected in a case study carried out by Thomas (1996). He studied a second language student enrolled in an intermediate English course who preferred to read newspapers, watch TV, meet native speakers, rather than to attend the lessons. The student successfully developed his communicative competence in English using these OCLL activities instead of receiving formal instruction. Thomas concluded that OCLL could be more useful to learn a foreign language for some students.

Breen (2001) added that differences among out-of-class contexts are to be considered as each context provides different kind of opportunities for language learning. As such, different learners can learn different linguistic skills as a result of the various contexts in which they may find themselves. As he concluded:

> Different contexts are defined differently by participants; what is meaningful and significant to them is likely to be context specific; and how they act in them including how they interact and what and how they learn through such interaction is also likely to be context specific. (Breen, 2001, p. 180).

Larger studies have more recently been undertaken in China with similar results. Chan *et al.* (2002) studied 508 undergraduate students enrolled in an English course at the University of Hong Kong. Results obtained showed that the use of English out of the classroom was mainly dedicated to individual leisure activities. Nearly equal results were found in Hyland's (2004) research with 228 would-be teachers in Hong Kong, in which 60% of the participants made use of OCLL activities, but these activities were mainly individual ones, not allowing interaction outside of the classroom.

A research undertaken by Knight (2007) with 41 of college ESL program showed that OCLL influence language proficiency as they found a significant correlation between using the language out of class and learner proficiency in English.

What these researches seems to stress is that FL/SL language development is a process which do not occur only in a formal context, but it needs to be complemented by out-of-class learning. Literature reviewed suggests that English outside of the classroom is an important component for the development of students' communicative competence. The quantity and quality of the OCLL activities, depending on the learner's preferences and strategies, will be especially significant for the successful development of EFL students' communicative competence. Following this belief that OCLL may have positive benefits in the development of proficiency in a target language, Field (2007) recommended FL teachers that students should develop the necessary skills to acquire the language both from inside and outside the classroom context.

It seems that much research has focused on second language context, but there has not been enough investigation on the effect of using oriented OCLL in foreign language context, where it may have a particular significant role. In a context where English is not spoken out of the classroom, teachers should provide learners with plenty of opportunities to practice their skills in more diverse situations as a mean towards learners' autonomy.

The present study examines the effect of using out-of-class language learning and English language communicative competence in the concrete context of a Primary School in Colombia, where the curriculum is mainly focused on linguistic or grammatical competence and explicit teaching of rules characterize the EFL lesson.

Methodology

Aiming at solving problems found in our current teaching praxis, the research paradigm used in this work is action research (AR). As Wallace supported, "Action research is conducted by teachers and for teachers. It is small scale, contextualized, localized, and aimed at discovering, developing, or monitoring changes to practice" (2000, p. 17). This methodology allows the teacher-researcher to obtain data from his/her students' performance and reflect on its effectiveness. In doing so, action-research helps the teacher-researcher in finding solutions to problems derived from the methodology, the context, the students or any other educational agent.

The research paradigm is based on the "before and after" experimental methodology promoting praxis reflection, as its most distinctive feature. All AR methodologies are organized in spiral form and comprise, at least, the following stages: problem detection, action plan design, action plan implementation and reflection.

A quasi-experimental research design with a pre- and post-test was used, based on the quantitative analysis of the data obtained (Johnson, 2011). First, a pretest was used to corroborate our problematic situation. Then, the action plan was designed aiming at promoting communication, both inside and outside the classroom and elaborating communicative tasks for both groups. Two classes of sixth-grade were used: the experimental and control group. The action plan was implemented during a 4-month period. In the control group classroom was used as learning context whereas experimental group undertook the activities in out-of-class contexts such as library, cafeteria, sports fields, school restaurant and open space. After the experiment, both groups were post-evaluated to measure the effect of the action plan. Finally, results were analyzed to

corroborate or refute our hypotheses. Conclusions were drawn from the statistical analysis and suggestions for further research were considered.

Research Hypotheses

Taking into account the situation described above and the literature reviewed about second language acquisition and out-of-class language learning, we have assumed the following research hypotheses:

(1) Students at our teaching context do not reach the standards proposed by the Colombian Ministry for the 2019 as the input within classrooms, both provided by the teacher and materials, are not sufficient to guarantee success of certain skills in the foreign language.

(2) If students are given the opportunities for interaction in a variety of out-of-class contexts, then their communicative competence in English will be enriched.

Research Question

The present study is designed to answer the following question:

(1) Does our participants' communicative competence live up to the expectations stated by the National Ministry of Education in Colombia?

(2) What is the effect of using out-of-class learning program on EFL learners' communicative competence within our particular context?

Research Objectives

In response to the above question, the general objective of our research aims at improving participants' communicative competence through the implementation of an OCLL complementary program.

Particularly, the detailed objectives of this research are:

(1) To analyze the current level of our participants' communicative competence.

(2) To identify the effect of using OCLL in students performance in English.

Research Context & Participants

This research is focused on the particular teaching context of a Colombian public school of Primary Education. It is located in Sincelejo city, Sucre (Colombia). The school provides all the levels of education with 68 groups and a total population of 2.275 students. The total number of teachers is 65 and only 3 of them are English language teachers and they are only dedicated to Secondary Education. The educational offer of this school includes three hours of English as a foreign language per week. The layout of the classrooms corresponds to the traditional model and there is no English laboratory to teach this subject. Classrooms lack of comfort, as they are very small or very large and dim.

A total of 70 students from 6th grade took part in this research. Two groups were established: the experimental and the control group, with 35 students each. The groups were not randomly distributed, as they were the result of the school organization. The main characteristics of the participants were:

1) Genre distribution (Figure 1) was equilibrated among the participants. From the total number of participants, 31 were women and 39 were men. In the experimental group, we found a slight increase of men compared to women. However, in the control group, genre distribution was equilibrated.

2) In relation to age, nearly all of the participants were 11 years all, being the mean of the experimental group 11,17 and 11,26 for the control group.

3) Finally, the socio-economic statuses of the participants were organized in three groups according to the information provided by the school: Status A: lower class, Status B: lower middle class, and Status C: middle class. The socio-economic distribution of the two groups (Figure 2) showed that there was a majority of participants from a lower middle class both in the experimental and control group, although slightly higher in the control group.
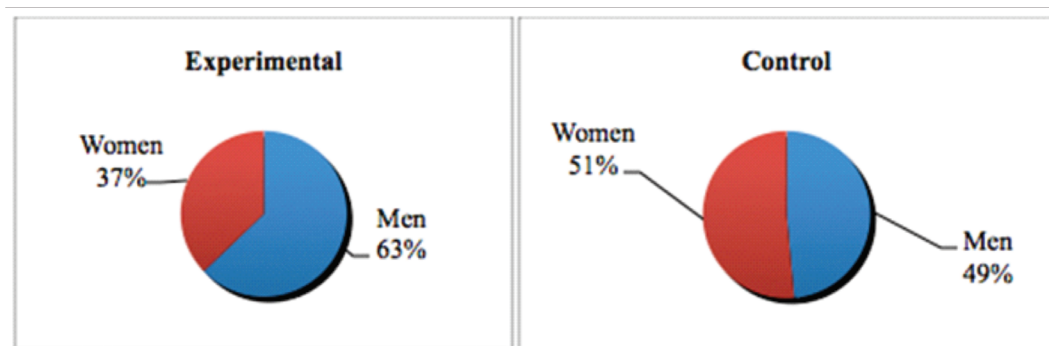

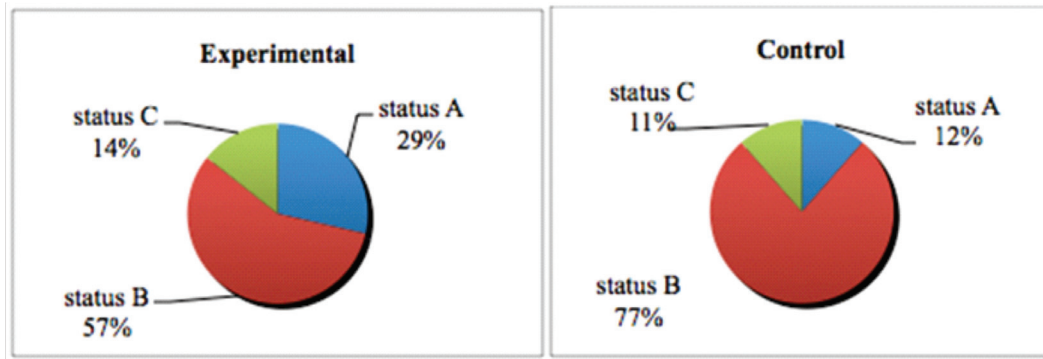**Figure 1.** Distribution of the Participants According to Genre.

Figure 2. Socio-economic distribution of participants.

Research Tools & Administration

The research tools involved in this research were an ad-hoc communicative competence test based on students' performance while undertaking a communicative task. The test was designed to measure students' overall communicative competence and their performance in communicative situation according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). The test comprises four tasks, each one related to the specific topics of the out-of-class spaces where the experiment took place: cafeteria, library, sport field and school restaurant. Students were asked to cope with a communicative task, with certain freedom to use the language in authentic communicative situations. Participants were then tape-recorded and evaluated by EFL teachers using a rubric which was compound of a set of 11 criteria, each one drawn up on the four components of Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence at the A2 level (Basic 2 according to the Colombian framework):

A) Grammatical competence:

(1) The student use adequate pronunciation and intonation when using the language.

(2) The student shows evidence about the knowledge of the language system when using the language.

B) Sociolinguistic competence:

(3) The student uses appropriate vocabulary and expressions according to the context.

(4) The student enjoys using the language during the activities out-of-class/inside classroom.

(5) The student participates in his/her interactions taking into account the bases of communicative: "respect and turn-taking".

C) Discourse competence:

(6) The student is able to produce simple expressions when using the language out-of-classroom/inside classroom.

(7) The student uses the language in a spontaneous way out-of-classroom/inside classroom.

(8) The student speaks fluent English when using the language in places different from the classroom/inside classroom

D) Strategic competence:

(9) The student uses adequate resources available in places different form the classroom/inside classroom

(10) The student focuses his/her attention in the activities performed out-of-class/inside classroom.

(11) The student finds easy to use the language at places out-of-class/inside classroom.

Responses are rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always). The four communicative tasks were used before and after the experiment. After collecting the information, results were statistically analyzed.

Research Variables

Two types of variables were considered:

A) Dependent variables:

1. Pret-test results on participants' communicative competence

2. Post-test results on participants' communicative competence

B) Independent variables:

3. Assigned group: experimental/control

Description of the Action Plan

Foreign and second language instruction in Colombia has the potential disadvantage of occurring within a formal, context-reduced environment. There is a need for creating opportunities to use the language for real purposes. In this research, a syllabus was designed with the aim of increasing the students' exposure to the English language use and to give them opportunities to develop their English skills in communicative situations using varied and authentic contexts. Each lesson was concerned with specific practices and themes of each out-of-class context; for example, cooking in school restaurant, playing sport

on the field, buying in the cafeteria, borrowing a book in a library etc. The syllabus (see Appendix) was the same for both groups although procedures and activities differ in the contexts where activities were developed: lessons for the control group were carried out in the classroom, whereas in the experimental group a variety of out-of-class contexts were used. The syllabus was divided into four lesson plans. The duration of each lesson plan was four weeks, three hours of English per week scheduled.

Results & Discussion

The statistical analysis carried out in this research is both descriptive −to illustrate the studied dependent and independent variables−, and inferential −to contrast the mean between the pretest and the post-test−. For the inferential analysis we selected the parametric test of T-test, as the distribution analysis of the sample (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test) was not significant (>,05); therefore, we assumed that the sample was normally distributed. All statistical analysis was carried out with the software SPSS 17 for Windows. Results have been organized to answer the two research questions.

Research Question 1: Does our participants' communicative competence live up to the expectations stated by the National Ministry of Education in Colombia?

As we described in the background of this study, the National Ministry of Education of Colombia has described some standards for students' communicative competence in a foreign language that needs to be addressed by the year 2019. For the 6th grade learners should reach a Basic 2 (A2 level). The administered pretest (A2 level) showed a mean in the pretest of 1,48 (min.=1/max.=4)

with a Standard Deviation of ,076. These results portray that students at the 6th grade do not reach the A2 level required by the Colombian Ministry of Education.

Figure 3 shows the comparison of the pre-test mean scores of the experimental and control group. Capital letters correspond to each of the spaces on which the syllabus was designed and their temporal organization:

A: Library
B: Sports Field
C: Cafeteria
D: School Restaurant

Both groups obtained similar mean scores on pretests in the Spaces A, C and D, hovering around 1,63 and with a minimal difference in Space B of 0,26. Learners barely reached the beginner level (the total mark of which was 4), though students in both groups were still equivalent. According to these results, our first hypothesis was confirmed, and group equivalence was established.

Research Question 2: What is the effect of using out-of-class learning program on EFL learners' communicative competence within our particular context?

In order to find out the effectiveness of using out-of-class contexts on the improvement of the communicative competence of the experimental group and to compare their performance with that of their counterparts' in the control group, a post-test was administered to both groups after the action plan. The overall mean of the experimental group at the post-test was 2,28 out of 4 compared to the 2,18 of the control group. The descriptive analysis of the results from the post-test is presented in Figure 4.

As shown, the mean of the experimental group appears to have a higher value than that of the control group in the four space-based topics of the test.
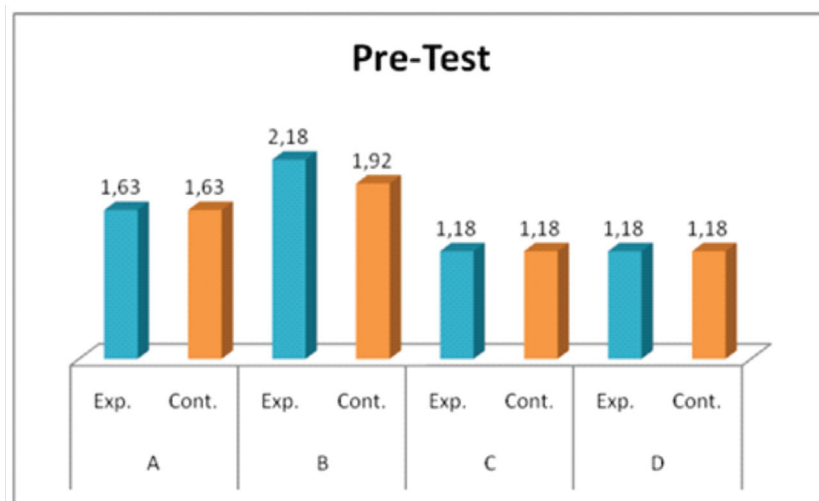

Figure 3. Pre-Test mean comparisons between the Experimental and Control Group.

A more detailed observation of the performance in communicative situations obtained through the observation chart is presented below.

Data in Table 1 shows an improvement from the pretest to the post-test in the experimental and in the control group. Differences between the pretest and the post-test are slightly higher in all spaces, favoring the experimental group, except for Space B, in which the control group obtained better results. Focusing on the experimental group, we have detected higher improvements in spaces C and D, although the highest mean was obtained by the experimental group in Space B. Hence, contrasting the different spaces, Space A, i.e. Library, is the out-of-class space which obtained worse results, whereas spaces related to free-time and non-academic activities performed better.

A closer look at the analyzed criteria (see Table 2) shows that the experimental group has surpassed the value of 2 out of 4 in all criteria, whereas control group has failed in two criteria. Moreover, control group appeared to have

better results in criteria 1 and 2 than the experimental group. These criteria comprise grammatical competence; therefore, we can suggest that in-class instruction has a higher impact on students' grammatical competence. It is also important to highlight that the criteria 3 and 4 in the experimental group obtained the highest mean scores, revealing that OCLL context has improved participants' socio-linguistic competence.

These results seem to confirm our second hypothesis indicating that if students were given opportunities for interaction in a variety of out-of-classroom contexts, then their communicative competence would develop more deeply, particularly fluency. In order to statistically confirm this difference, a T-test for independent samples was carried out with the post-test results of both groups.

Overall mean T-test shows that there is a difference of nearly 1 point between the experimental and the control group in the post-test results; however, there is no statistical significance in this difference ($\rho=,081$). If we consider the different parts of the test in isolation,
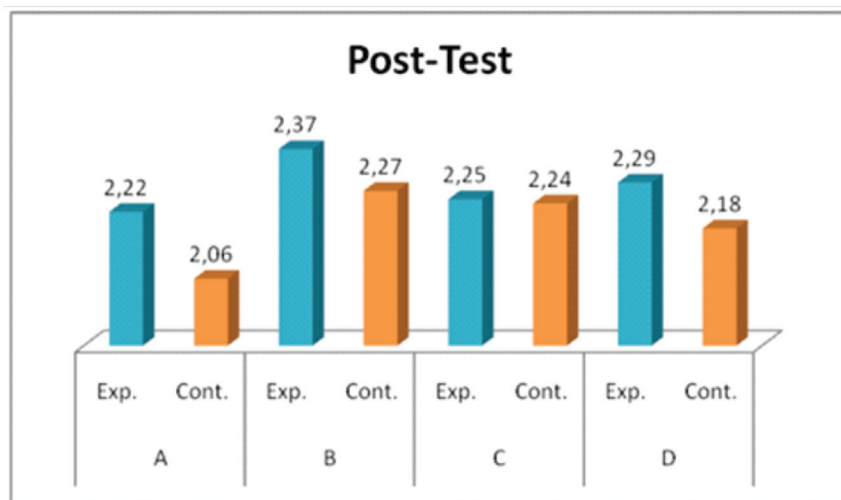

Figure 4. Post-Test Comparison of the Experimental and Control Group.

Table 1. Pre-test/Post-test Comparison of the Experimental and Control Group.

		PRETEST	POSTEST	DIFFERENCE
SPACE A –MEAN	EXPERIMENTAL	1,63	2,22	0,59
	CONTROL	1,63	2,06	0,43
SPACE B –MEAN	EXPERIMENTAL	2,18	2,37	0,19
	CONTROL	1,92	2,27	0,35
SPACE C-MEAN	EXPERIMENTAL	1,18	2,25	1,07
	CONTROL	1,18	2,24	1,06
SPACE D –MEAN	EXPERIMENTAL	1,18	2,29	1,11
	CONTROL	1,18	2,18	1

Table 2. Detailed Post-test Comparison between the Experimental and Control Group.

		A POSTEST		B POSTEST		C POSTEST		D POSTEST		MEAN POSTEST	
		Exp.	Cont.	Exp.	Cont.	Exp.	Cont.	Exp.	Cont.	EXP.	CONT.
Grammatical competence	Criteria 1	2,29	2,14	2,43	2,37	1,94	2,31	1,94	2,03	2.15	2.21
	Criteria 2	1,74	2,00	2,31	2,43	2,17	2,06	2,23	2,31	2.11	2.2
Socio-linguistic competence	Criteria 3	2,17	2,14	2,77	2,23	2,26	2,11	2,63	2,17	2.45	2.16
	Criteria 4	2,94	2,17	2,91	2,20	2,77	2,71	2,57	2,11	2.79	2.29
	Criteria 5	2,17	2,26	2,23	2,63	2,11	2,71	2,17	2,71	2.17	2.57
Discursive competence	Criteria 6	2,20	1,94	2,11	2,29	2,54	2,23	2,20	2,29	2.26	2.18
	Criteria 7	2,17	1,77	2,17	1,94	2,37	2,11	2,20	2,11	2.22	1.98
	Criteria 8	2,20	2,20	2,14	2,26	1,71	2,06	2,17	1,97	2.05	2.12
Strategic competence	Criteria 9	2,14	1,86	2,49	2,00	2,54	2,00	2,54	2,09	2.42	1.98
	Criteria 10	2,29	2,14	2,11	2,71	2,14	2,40	2,11	2,20	2.16	2.36
	Criteria 11	2,14	2,11	2,49	2,00	2,26	2,00	2,51	2,00	2.35	2.02
	MEAN	2,22	2,06	2,37	2,27	2,25	2,24	2,29	2,18		

Table 3. T-test between the post-test means of the Experimental and Control Group.

	t-value	Sig. (bilateral)	Mean difference
Space A	1,939	,057	,11688
Space B	1,959	,054	,10130
Space C	,162	,872	,01039
Space D	2,384	,020*	,15584
Post-test average mean	1,772	,081	,09610

we found that three out of the four space-based topics are statistically significant – Space D: School restaurant– or nearly significant – Space A: Library and Space B: Sport Fields–. On the other hand, Space C – cafeteria- presents the less significant results with a t-value of ,162. A possible reason for this discrepancy in results can be found in the slight difference between results obtained in both groups and, of course, in the nature of Space C, which was the space in which participants were more mixed with the rest of students who were not participating in the experiment and, thus, speaking in Spanish. Participants were not focused on interacting in English, as other students were addressing to them in Spanish.

Differences exist to the advantage of the treatment group, which is consistent with theoretical research hypotheses and prior empirical research findings indicating that exposing students to the target language outside the classroom in communicative situations helps learners to perform tasks in the language fluently, and noted that functional practice is fundamental to the development of all language skills (Huang and Naerssen, 1987). Ellis (1994) also concluded that learners get more benefits from formal language instruction when it is coupled with opportunities for natural exposure to the language.

Conclusions

The main goal of this research study was to determine the effect of using out-of-class contexts on EFL learners' communicative competence within a particular school context in Colombia. Pearson (2003) suggested that little is researched about what teachers and learners do out of the class to improve communicative competence, and this research has tried to contribute to this lack of data.

After analyzing the most relevant literature on language acquisition and OCLL research, an action-research was planned in order to find a possible solution at the low performance in English found in our teaching context in Colombia. Results obtained were analyzed and discussed and helped us to reach the following conclusions:

1. Participants do not live up to the expectations about English language level proposed by the Ministry of Education in Colombia for the 6th Grade learners. Low competence in English seems to characterize Colombian students.

2. The OCLL program improved participants' communicative competence, mainly fluency, compared with traditional classes. However, we could not corroborate this positive effect statistically in all the spaces used. There is

a need to continue with the research to extend the sample and the period of time dedicated to OCLL.

3. Results were better in ludic and non-academic spaces, such as the school restaurant and sport field, than in the library. However, slight differences were found between both groups in the Cafeteria Space due to the interference with the mother tongue. A motivation factor may be behind these results, but careful attention should be paid to the use of the target language. Therefore, the program should focus on these spaces rather than in the library and further research should be carried out to corroborate these preferences.

To follow up, findings obtained clearly claim that the Colombian government has overestimated the participants' English language level. More investment in teacher training and resources will obviously affect positively this situation. But in the meanwhile, OCLL can be an excellent solution to increase students' exposure to real language, as well as to give them opportunities to practice the language naturally. Out-of-class experiences further generated more student-teacher and student-student interactions. Participants seem to have outcome the control group in real communicative aspects of the assessment, thus contributing to the essence of the communicative competence, i.e., being effective communicators. We conclude that out-of-classroom learning has had a positive effect on the participants' communicative competence. Although we believe that a more extensive study in terms of longer exposure time on out-of-class context may arrive at more accurate conclusions.

Even though this research has been carried out in a particular teaching context, the parametric test carried out allows us to infer these conclusions to similar populations. Unfortunately, a strong focus on form and the lack of qualified teachers is not so uncommon in other FL contexts. Thus, it can be suggested that EFL teachers should be familiarized with advantages of using OCLL as a possible solution to non-natural context in which the target language is not particularly used not only out of the classroom, but also inside it. In particular, language teachers can use the technique presented in this study, as a strategy to promote their learners' overall communicative competence.

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Appendix: Syllabus

Unit	Title	Out-of-class context	Functions and tasks	Grammar	Vocabulary
1	School	Library	Talking about library Talking about what people are doing Asking for some books/information Describing room	What's this? What are these? Nouns. *This/that/these/those* Present Continuous	Library and furniture
2	Sports	Open spaces Sports field	Talking about what people are doing Talking about ability	Present Continuous Can/Can't (ability) Like/don't like – ing	Sports and games
3	Food	Cafeteria School Restaurant	Talking about, foods and drinks Talking about prices Asking for things Designing a menu Shopping; ordering food Preparing some drink, meal, and salad	What's this? What are these? Plural and uncountable nouns a/some How much is it/are they? I'd like... Can I have... please? Preposition of place Present Continuous Simple Present Tense	Food and drink Price, Money